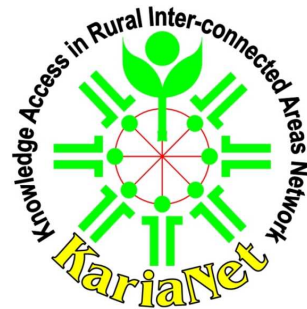


KNOWLEDGE ACCESS FOR RURAL INTERCONNECTED AREAS NETWORK
KARIA NET



**EVALUATION OF THE EXPERIENCE
OF THE COMMUNITY ICT PILOT PROJECT
IN JORDAN**

DRAFT VERSION 1.0
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PREPARED BY THE REGIONAL COORDINATION UNIT

This report was prepared in Arabic on the request of KariaNet RCU by Ebraheem Tahaat, Community-based Knowledge Facilitator of Hartha Community ICT Pilot Project, and the members of the Facilitation Unit of Yarmouk Project, Jordan, under the supervision of Eng. Awni Shdaifat, Yarmouk Project Manager. It was reviewed by Dr. Mustapha Malki, Regional Coordinator of KariaNet, before it was presented by the author during the 3rd Annual Thematic Workshop held in Cairo (28-31 October 2007). The present document represents a translation of the original report, commissioned by KariaNet RCU.

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Evaluation Report of the Pilot Experience of the Community ICT Centre Implemented in Hartha

1. Introduction

In order to achieve the objectives of KariaNet in terms of reaching rural communities targeted by IFAD-funded developmental projects, KariaNet Design Document included the setup of a pilot centre in a rural community targeted by one of the member projects. The aim of this pilot project is to enhance the use of modern ICTs among the members of this community for information retrieval and experience exchange. For this purpose, Yarmouk Project in Jordan was selected to host and implement the setup of the pilot centre in one of the rural communities. Consequently, Hartha community in Bani Kenana District of Irbid Governorate was selected in this perspective. Both the host project and the sponsored community were selected after a transparent, competitive call for applications among all member projects.

Hartha is a rural community, located in North Jordan, at the border with Syria. Administratively, it belongs to Bani Kenana in Irbid Governorate. It forms with other villages under the Commune of Al Kafarat. Hartha village is distant from Irbid, the governorate capital, by 18 km and counts around 7,000 inhabitants. Within its territory, one can find an important dam called "El Wihda", which serves both Syria and Jordan, yet it is located at the Syrian border. This village counts four schools, among which two secondary schools for boys and girls.

Hartha is known for olive production, especially Roman olive trees. Going to Hartha history, many nations and civilizations settled in the area, such as Byzantines, Romans and Greeks (before the Islam), then the Arabs after the appearance of Islam in the Arabian Peninsula. The community is famous for its archaeological heritage, like Abela, the Roman city.

2. Problems Encountered by the Village Population

Given that the community rural and natural environment, agriculture is the main source of livelihood to a large extent, and the community members practice the following activities: olive tree production, food crops (such as wheat and barley), fruit tree cultivation (such as peach, apricot, almond and pomegranate, sheep and goat raising, dairy cattle, bee keeping, and food industry (dairy products, pomegranate extract).

In order to practice these activities, the community members require knowledge and information about the following:

- Olive tree cultivation: Knowledge and information on cultivation practices, harvesting, methods of production storage and conservation, oil extraction, and market prices.
- Dairy cattle: Knowledge and information on husbandry (or flock management), nutrition, health care, and dairy processing.
- Food crops: Knowledge and information on cultivation practices, harvesting (grain, straw), storage, and marketing.

- Agricultural subsidies and credit policies: Knowledge and information on the different types of subsidies, available loans at the Agriculture Credit Company (ACC).

To access the above-mentioned elements of knowledge and information, the local community depends on different sources that are: the Agricultural Service of Bani Kenana District, the Extension Service of Bani Kenana District, the District Experimental Station (Marw station) of the National Centre for Agriculture Research and Extension (NCARE), the Bani Kenana District office of Agricultural Credit Corporation (ACC), Hartha Charitable Society, Northern Inputs Procurement Office of the Cereal Board, experienced people (old persons, other farmers), veterinarians (in both public and private sectors), the Development and Employment Fund, traders, consumers, NGOs supporting rural woman development activities, etc.

To regularly and continuously access these knowledge and information elements, the community must strengthen its relations with all partners. For this purpose, the community needs to use modern ICTs, which will help it enhancing and improving dialogue, coordination and communication with its partners. However, the community is characterized by tremendous weaknesses, which unfortunately make it unable to use ICTs in an efficient way. And this has engendered an overall weakness in knowledge management and sharing and information exchange, especially lack of documentation of experiences and success stories. As a matter of fact, the community weaknesses are as follows:

- Lack of experience and information that could help in solving daily problems encountered by the community members while practicing their activities.
- Lack of required means and tools that could help the community members gain and strengthen their experiences.
- Weak capacity of community members regarding ICT use.

Documentation of experiences and success stories is considered as one of the main items in the process of exchange and sharing between the community and the other parties in relation. It would contribute to access new ideas and good practices, that could help the community members saving time, money and efforts, in addition to meeting the needs of the local community, and solving its problems, through accessing others' experiences.

For this reason, Yarmouk Project, in collaboration with KariaNet, decided to implement the above-mentioned pilot project, aiming at developing and enhancing community members' skills regarding the use of ICTs and other tools for experiences and knowledge documentation. The ultimate goal of this would be the facilitation of experience exchange and knowledge sharing among community members, on the one hand, and between them and their partners.

3. Project Goals, Principles, Components and Activities

3.1. Project Goals

The overall goal of this pilot project is to contribute to the improvement of living and income conditions of Hartha community members through a facilitated access to the

experiences of other partners and retrieval of useful information that could help meeting their needs. Regarding its purpose, the project seeks to strengthen the community capacities in terms of communication and participation in knowledge sharing and experience and information exchange among its members and with the partners.

3.2. Project Principles

The project is articulated on the following principles:

- 1- The pilot project should overtly serve the goal of the selected community regarding knowledge sharing and improved access to information in the light of the achievement of the developmental goal related to the enhancement of living and income conditions of the community members.
- 2- The pilot project should pay much attention to the human dimension regarding knowledge sharing and improved access to information. For this purpose, there is a need to setup Local Knowledge Network that must be facilitated and administered the Community-based Knowledge Facilitator (CBKF). The network will support the Pilot Community ICT Centre by identifying and responding to the knowledge and information needs of the local community.
- 3- The pilot project should strengthen and improve the linkages between similar rural communities within or outside KariaNet through the consideration of a "twinning" strategy which will be based on two different dimensions:
 - Within KariaNet: linking at least two rural communities.
 - Outside KariaNet: giving some degree of freedom to the selected community to setup new exchange linkages with any other community or party, which might provide useful service to the community members.
- 4- The pilot project must consider as its first priority the issue of knowledge sharing and information exchange throughout the activities it will implement in the selected community in collaboration with the IFAD-funded host project (Yarmouk Project).
- 5- The pilot project should focus on capacity building at the level of the community as well as the skills enhancement of the host project staff, involved in the implementation, for a more successful support to the pilot project.

3.3. Project Components and Activities

The pilot project will intervene on the basis of the following components and activities.

Component 1 - Developing information management system and enhancing ICT use

The activities of this component are:

- 1.1. Identify the Community-based Knowledge Facilitator
- 1.2. Acquire the required equipment for the Community ICT Centre (computers, printers, digital video and photo cameras, photocopier, etc.)
- 1.3. Organise a training course on knowledge management and facilitation for the CBKF
- 1.4. Setup of a LAN at Hartha Charitable Society
- 1.5. Organise training courses on computer and ICT use for Hartha community members.

Component 2 – Facilitating access to knowledge and information

The activities of this component are:

- 2.1. Organise awareness workshops for Hartha community members on computer and ICT use
- 2.2. Organise a workshop on knowledge sharing for Hartha community leaders
- 2.3. Search information based on Hartha Community members' queries

Component 3 – Developing content and capacity of documentation and sharing

The activities of this component are:

- 3.1. Organise a start-up workshop of the Local Knowledge Network in Hartha community that will be coordinated by the CBKF
- 3.2. Inventory main success stories and best practices in Hartha community
- 3.3. Document and disseminate success stories and best practices
- 3.4. Establish a twinning between Hartha with another KariaNet community

4. Project Implementation Mechanisms

First – Services to be Offered by the Pilot Project

- 1- Procurement of some equipment for documentation of experiences, success stories and good practices, as well as for enhancing the use of ICTs for knowledge sharing.
- 2- Training of local community members regarding ICT use, whenever the educational level of individuals allows that.
- 3- Organisation of discussion fora for the community members, either between themselves, or with other communities, via low-cost ICT use such as Skype.
- 4- Setup of specific groups for information search according to community members' needs.
- 5- Organisation of group or individual sessions for success stories' documentation, facilitated by the CBKF or any other hosting project staff (Yarmouk Project) so that community members could play the central role of knowledge providers.
- 6- Setup of a local knowledge network that includes all concerned partners.

Second – participators parties and their role in the implementation process

- 1- KariaNet: Supervision on the pilot project implementation and contribution to some activities' costs.
- 2- Yarmouk Project (host project): Selecting the CBKF among the project staff and training him/her; involving of project staff in Bani Kenana field unit in implementing the planned activities; monitoring pilot project activities and preparing reports; and undertaking the primary study on community needs (Hartha).
- 3- CBKF role: Assisting community members in ICT use for knowledge sharing and information exchange; facilitating documentation of success stories and good practices by the community members; playing the mediator role between the community and its partners in addition to the coordination role of the local knowledge network; contributing to the implementation of the pilot project activities; and preparing the progress reports to be submitted to the host project manager (Yarmouk Project).

- 4- Hartha Charitable Society: Providing the premises where to located the pilot project; providing some starter equipment required for the implementation of the pilot project activities (such as computers and other needed resources); covering the costs of the ICT centre's operation and equipment maintenance; monitoring the work of the pilot project; helping other parties in carrying out workshops, meetings and training courses; and securing the premises for the local knowledge network meetings.
- 5- Hartha community members: Attending awareness campaigns and training courses (males and females) on ICT use for knowledge sharing; contributing to discussions with their own experiences, good practices and success stories in order to share them with others.
- 6- Local Knowledge Network members: contributing in the identification of the knowledge gaps encountered by community; helping community members to access complementary, useful information through the pilot centre; participating in collecting success stories and good practices from local community; and helping community members in documenting them.

5. Project achievements

The pilot project was started in June 2006 after the signature of the Memorandum of Grant Conditions (MGC) between the Ministry of Agriculture (on behalf of Yarmouk Project, the host project) and IDRC (on behalf of KariaNet).

Most of project activities have been carried out in the second half of 2006 and the year 2007. Below are some of the pilot project achievements per component and activity, according to the project logframe and planning.

Component 1 - Developing information management system and enhancing ICT use

Achievements of this component are as follows:

- 1.1. Engineer Ebraheem Tahaat was designated among Yarmouk Project staff to work as the Community-based Knowledge Facilitator (CBKF).
- 1.2. Procurement of 5 computers with accessories in addition to 2 laser printers, 1 fax machine, 1 digital camera, 1 digital photo camera, 1 photocopier, as well as stuffing the ICT Centre with air conditioners and necessary features.
- 1.3. The CBKF attended a training course on facilitation and knowledge management and sharing through ICT use.
- 1.4. A Local Area Network (LAN) was setup in Hartha Charitable Society, linking all computers to share Internet access through an ADSL line.
- 1.5. 5 training courses on computer and ICT use at the benefit of the community members (males and females). 50 community members in total attended these courses, among which 23 women.

Component 2 - Facilitating access to knowledge and information

Achievements of this component are as follows:

- 2.1. 4 awareness workshops were organized to the benefit of community members to conscientise them about computer and ICT use: three of them were organized in

Hartha community, while the fourth Malaka community, another community benefiting from Yarmouk Projects services, preparing by the way the replication of the pilot project to other communities.

A workshop on the advantages of knowledge sharing was organised to the benefit of the community leaders was organized in July

implementation process, such as getting some procedures to be finalized in due time (i.e. procurement procedure through the Ministry of Agriculture). Another constraint was the difficulty – sometimes – to gather the community members at the same time, given their different agricultural activities and practices. The last but not the least constraint was the issue of English as a difficulty encountered by the persons in charge of assisting the community members during the sessions of information search on Internet.

6. Project Effects

- Enhanced capacity at the community in terms of ICT use.
- Easy access of community members to required information and useful knowledge.
- Increased consciousness of community members in terms of adoption and use of good practices that could be accessed via an efficient use of ICTs, which may engender an increase in agricultural productivity and consequently contribute in poverty alleviation.
- Encouragement of community members to interact with their daily problems, and understand them very well before attempting to solve them.

7. Lessons learned

- After reviewing the evaluation of the different awareness workshops organised by the pilot project, most women participants suggested that a woman facilitator should be involved in the implementation team of the pilot project, as well as separating men and women during the training courses on ICT use. It was then by the host project management to add a woman facilitator to the actual CBKF.
- One of the main success factors in such a project is the strengthening of linkages between the different local partners, as main sources of knowledge and information for the community members, so that these partners could contribute in implementing the pilot project activities. In this perspective, the pilot project experience facilitated partners' involvement in different activities of the pilot project, which made implementation of activities much easier and smoother, in addition to its supportive dimension in disseminating information within the community.
- Procurement of equipment and mobilization of premises to establish an "access point" wherein communication activities are implemented are not enough to make such activities succeed given that success is conditioned by the resources that can be provided by the local community, especially human resources in (this kind of project, in addition - of course - to equipment and funds. One of the constraints encountered by the pilot project activities was the non-availability of the community members during some agricultural seasons, which engendered some delays in implementing certain activities of the pilot project. In addition to that, traditions, customary values and cultural habits have been constraining sometimes the role of the CBKF when implementing some activities.

ANNEXES

Success Story 1

ICT use contributes to honeybee keeping enhancement

Hartha Charitable Society carries out diverse activities in addition to the ones it implements in collaboration with Yarmouk Project, such as organising training courses on ICT use to the benefit of the community members. This is so given that this NGO intervenes in an area where the population suffers from severe poverty and unemployment that is reflected in the living and income conditions of the population. Among these activities, one can mention the honeybee-keeping project.

The project started in 2006 with a support from the Ministry of Planning, estimated by 30,000 JD, to be given to the HCS in many shares, linking each share to the implementation of a given activity, such as acquisition of a bus for local transportation and project operations, procurement of 10 beehives, in addition to procurement of specific equipment and mobilization of premises for the sake of the project. Along with this project and the ministry's support to it, HCS organised 3 training courses to the benefit of community members about job creation and setup of small projects. In this perspective, HCS, represented by its President, signed an agreement with Mr. Mansur Mahmud Obeidat, head of a 17-member family, and Mr. Odai El Amry, head of 6-member family, both having participated in the above-mentioned courses. The subject of the agreement was related to the monitoring of a certain number of beehives, in return of one third of the honey production.

With the help of the CBKF, both persons could log on Internet and get familiar with the methods of information search and gradually became able to apply ICTs for the need of their daily (honey beekeeping). With this they could learn about the method of raising two queens in each beehive, which would double the population of each behave and consequently double the honey production. They also learned a lot about honeybee diseases and how to prevent and cure them with natural means, such as using thyme and other plants to fight against the varroa disease instead of some chemical products. Both persons are keeping themselves updated with new information from Internet, especially about honeybee keeping, due to the Community ICT Pilot Project of Hartha.

As a consequence, honey production reached 1,000 kg in 2006, distributed as 650kg for HCS and 350 kg for the two supervisors. HCS sold its amount for 8-10 JD per kilo and gained 5,000 JD in that year, after subtracting the project costs. This income would strengthen the role of HCS in the community and help diversify its portfolio of activities developed to the benefit of the community members. At the same time, each of the two supervisors earned a monthly income of 150 JD in the same year.

Success Story 2

Using ICTs to improve agricultural practices

ICT use contributes to honeybee keeping enhancement

Lacking diversity in small income-generating projects is considered to be one of the main problems encountered by rural communities. When villagers see a certain project producing a good profit, they all start requesting the same project. A striking example on this can be dairy cattle production. Fewer persons bring innovative ideas about micro-projects that were never implemented before in the locality.

In such a situation, it is most likely that local markets will reach a point of total satisfaction with traditional products, like eggs and dairy products. Meanwhile, regarding other high-quality products like honey and cultivated thyme, such products can be marketed in big cities, such as the capital and other main governorates. Jordan is one of the poorest ten states in the world in terms of water, and the most important problem encountered by farmers is the scarcity of water.

Haj Ahmed Mohamed Zoqan Obeidat lives in Northern Jordan. He is an old man who worked during his entire life in the public sector, and at this retirement, his monthly salary reached around 170 JD. He lives with his wife and his 14 children in Hartha village. Since his retirement, he practises agriculture, on a piece of land of 10 dunums he inherited from his father. In 2005, Haj Ahmed requested a loan from Hartha Charitable Society to cultivate medicinal plants on his land. HCS accepted his request and he was granted a loan of 300 JD from the HCS Revolving Fund. With this loan, he could cultivate 1.25 dunum with thyme.

And since Haj Ahmed and some of his family members participated in the training courses on computer and ICT use, implemented by KariaNet Pilot Project, they participated in sessions of information search organised by the CBKF regarding the needs of local community. Based on their agricultural activity and the encountered problems in medicinal plants cultivation, such as the scarcity of water, the CBKF assisted them in learning how to access on Internet useful information about their activities, regarding how to choose the appropriate varieties and cultivars for the region, and the adequate cultural practices to apply on the crop cycle, and then achieving self-reliance on searching information they need, and positively deal with their daily problems in general. Taking advantage of this new capacity, Haj Ahmed learned about modern irrigation methods with high technical and economic efficiency on water, fertilization and other agricultural operations. After that, he established a buried cistern to collect rainwater for about 40 cubic meters, and added an electric water pump. Finally, he installed a drip irrigation system as well as other equip to obtain the highest output possible from his crops.

Since then, Haj Ahmed sells the best quality products and he is largely known for the quality of his products, and he gets most of buying orders by phone. His annual income increased more than 10 times, compared to its level before he applied these modern agricultural methods.

Haj Ahmed is very optimistic about expanding his project over the coming few years, and hopes that he will be able to improve his production, given that CBKF suggested that he should think about using green houses to cultivate some of his crops.